



**Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Fire and Aviation Management**



**Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Office of Fire and Aviation**

**Joint Statement by
USDA Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth and
USDI Bureau of Land Management Director Kathleen Clarke
December 6, 2002**

This year's tragic mishaps prompted an unprecedented look at our fire aviation program, and we jointly chartered an independent Blue Ribbon Panel to help us map a path to a safer future. We received the report and a briefing from the panel on Wednesday. What we have found is a system in need of repair. What began as an innovative program in the 1950s, to use recently retired military and civilian surplus aircraft to provide fire suppression safely and efficiently, now needs improvement. The technical details are outlined in the Blue Ribbon Panel's report, but today we want to make clear several important points:

- Public and employee safety is a core value for the Forest Service and BLM, it is also our responsibility and we take it seriously.
 - We want to make every fire fighting mission as safe as possible. We are going to make some near term changes to fix the safety issues identified by the panel and will be consulting with the Federal Aviation Administration to develop a rigorous inspection and maintenance program before we fly another mission or put another flight crew at risk.
 - We will continue to provide fire-fighting protection to the public, but will do so in a way that addresses the risks the panel has identified.
 - We would like to thank the panel members for their professionalism and hard work
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